

THE GUARDIAN

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Ted Puntillo, CVSO of Yolo County and myself Visited the VFW 2007 Convention in Sacramento for four days in June to talk with VFW members about who we are and what we do. Ted had put out some candy as an attraction and it almost worked too good. Anyway both Ted and myself were very surprised by what we heard members, officers and leaders of the VFW say about their personal claims with the VA. Many didn't have any claims and some of these were combat Veterans.

Tom & Pete,

I am going to share several observations that I made at the VFW Convention. I will also get together with Dennis Blessing to put an article in the CACVSO Newsletter that will be from both of us.

First of all I want to thank Dennis Blessing, Marvin King, Bob Johns and you two for showing up and getting our message out. Dennis was a trooper and set the table up Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. Marvin gave up his weekend both Saturday and Sunday to do this.

The one thing that surprised us all the most was that these types of meetings are prime events to generate new business for us. This was the single most eligible yet under served veteran population I have ever seen. Most of the conversations I had were with VFW Post Officers and long time members. I spoke with many combat veterans wearing hearing aids that were not getting them from the VA and were not SC for this hearing loss and tinnitus. I spoke with at least five of the same type of VFW Officers who were Vietnam Veterans with diabetes



The Guardian is published monthly by Dennis Blessing, Service Officer of the Madera County Veterans Service Office. It is freely issued, via email, to all Madera Veterans and Service Organizations.

The primary purpose of this publication is to provide County Veterans with a timely news source; effectively informing veterans of VA up-dates and other pertinent information. Hopefully, it will also serve as an inter-group vehicle, announcing important activities and information offered by other local service organizations.

Your comments and suggestions are always welcomed.

Dennis Blessing, Publisher

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Madera Ca 93637
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Dennis Blessing, Service Officer
(559) 675-7766

News you can use News you can use

and did not know about the presumptive SC for this disease for Vietnam Service. I spoke with atomic veterans with cancer who did not know they could file for SC for this condition. Many of the vets did not know about the Fee Waiver program. One vet was 20% and thought he had to be 100% to get the fee waiver. Another vet was 0% when he got out of the service in 1980 and never went back to the VA for a review, and did not know his children were eligible for the Fee-Waiver. This entire convention is a claim waiting to happen. When asked about their own post service officers, they said they did not actively file claims for the most part, but were appointed to the post to fulfill the requirements of the post. Several post service officers said they refer claims to the CVSO for processing. A lot of veterans knew the CVSO in their county and the conversation was always positive about their county office. Bill Mosley, Bill Densmore, George Compton and Gary Villalba were the most popular. There are no hard feelings for us at the Post level. We passed out many brochures and the directories were very well received. Los Angeles had the best booklet that covered all the basic claim information.

My impression was that these people as a group are way under served in the claim filing area. **The VFW's focus seems to be on membership and fund-raising.** They are very under served in the claim filing area. Most members do not even know the basics. Remember, these are the hierarchy of the organization. I am sure the knowledge level goes down when it comes to the rank and file member.

At the Friday session, Bill Manes, their political person, stated that the politicians have told him that the VFW has to get along with the Counties if they are to get any money. I don't know if Resolution #33 passed but it stated that the VFW was asking for more money from the state for outreach and included the county veterans officers in their request.

As far as outreach goes. The VFW needs to do in reach. They are under serving their own members terribly. I think the other organizations like the American Legion and DAV are probably the same. This could be a golden opportunity for us to be their service arms. They are all getting older and membership is declining. **They need us. We should try to partner with them to get the claims out of their membership.** In Yolo County I am the service Officer for all VFW's, American Legion and DAV posts. We could do this state-wide.

The CDVA is interested in outreach to generate new federal dollars coming into the state. The VFW is interested in outreach to prop up it's membership. They are failing miserably at generating new federal dollars for the State. The State will be wasting it's money by giving them anything for outreach if they think they will use it to file more claims. They have a sea of claims waiting to filed now with their current membership.

I also think that we as an organization should develop a strategy to attend all the Veterans groups conventions and meetings that we can. This is especially effective if the CVSO is a member already. I am a member of the American Legion and the VFW. We should also develop a set-up that includes all the counties brochures and our directory. This is a huge concentration of veterans and we can help them. No one I spoke with at the VFW convention knew anything close to what we know about the VA and claims filing.

Dennis and I had a lot of license plate brochures and so when the last meeting was letting out we stood by the door and past them out. It would be interesting to know if any of these developed into a sale!

Let's build on this in a non-confrontational helpful manner. We can help these people, and believe me they need help.

Your thoughts?

Thanks,

Ted

The Guardian



TriWest's \$500,000 Contribution Helps California Kids Cope with Deployment

PHOENIX (June 25, 2007) — Separated from parents who are defending the nation, the children of military families are also serving America. The separation, fear of losing a parent, and the nagging sense of uncertainty can put a heavy psychological burden on children.

Some 100 military children from Northern California are attending the Purple Camp, June 20th – 26th at Camp Mendocino 160 miles north of San Francisco, made possible in part by a \$500,000 contribution from Phoenix-based TriWest Healthcare Alliance to the National Military Family Association (NMFA).

“Military kids are learning how to cope with feelings of fear and uncertainty by participating in Operation Purple Camp where staff teaches the skills they need, mixed with a memorable week of the excitement and adventure,” said David J. McIntyre Jr., TriWest President and CEO.

“I learned that ‘home sickness’ to them means missing their family more than it means missing a home because they’re used to moving from base to base, but they never get used to missing their parents,” said Deborah Jaynes, a Northern California, licensed marriage and family therapist who is working at Camp Mendocino. A second camp just wrapped up in San Juan Capistrano on June 22nd.

“The children meet at these summer camps and learn they are not alone in the way they feel,” said McIntyre. “They also learn from camp counselors how to express and deal with their anxieties. Plus, they have a lot of well-deserved fun.”

As part of their ongoing commitment to provide a complete continuum of care for America’s military families, TriWest is proud to be a primary sponsor of the Operation Purple Camps in California.

There are, says NMFA, 220,000 children who have a parent absent, and 3,500 of them ages 7 to 18 will participate in one of 34 Purple Camps held in 26 states this summer.

About TriWest Healthcare Alliance

TriWest Healthcare Alliance partners with the Department of Defense to do "Whatever It Takes" to support the health care needs of 2.9 million members of America's military family. A Phoenix-based corporation, TriWest provides access to cost-effective, high-quality health care in the 21-state TRICARE West Region. TriWest is a proud Corporate Team Member of America Supports You. Visit www.triwest.com for more information.

About NMFA

The National Military Family Association is the only national organization whose sole focus is the military family and whose goal is to influence the development and implementation of policies that will improve the lives of the families of the seven uniformed services. For more than 35 years, its staff and volunteers, comprised mostly of military family members, have built a reputation for being the leading experts on military family issues.

PRESIDENT BUSH SIGNS CRAIG'S VETERANS BILL INTO LAW

\$3.2 billion measure will improve health delivery, overturns historic ban on attorneys, and expands benefits

(Washington, DC) On Friday President George Bush signed into law a \$3.2 billion comprehensive benefits and health care bill for veterans sponsored by U.S. Senator Larry Craig, the outgoing chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

"I hope veterans will rest a little easier this Christmas knowing that Congress did its job. We passed legislation that will enable this country to move forward with major construction projects for veterans and also will make some significant changes that will benefit veterans and their loved ones for generations to come," said Sen. Craig from his home near Boise, Idaho.

The bill the [President](#) signed is [S. 3421, the Veterans Benefits, Healthcare, and Information Technology Act of 2006](#).

Among its many provisions, the new law partially overturns a policy dating back to the Civil War era that has prohibited veterans from hiring attorneys to help them seek veterans' benefits until they have spent months – sometimes years – exhausting the administrative process. The original policy came during a time when lawyers were often self trained and notoriously unscrupulous. As signed into law, this bill will now allow veterans or other VA claimants to hire attorneys during VA's appeal process.

"The old law may have made sense in 1866, but 140 years later it was time to reexamine that outdated policy. Veterans will still have the option of utilizing the representation services provided without charge by many veterans organizations, but in addition they will have the option of hiring an attorney if they so choose," Craig said.

The legislation will also require VA to establish an Office of Rural Health. **"For rural states like [Idaho](#), the addition of this office should ensure that VA continues to focus on the needs and challenges of veterans who live in outlying areas,"** Craig said.

The new law should also help rural states by allowing VA to create a pilot program which makes non-VA facilities – such as private nursing homes or community hospitals – eligible for state veterans' home per diem payments.

"This change will allow veterans to stay closer to home and loved ones. I think that's important," Craig said.

Among its many provisions, the bill adds \$65 million to increase the number of clinicians treating [post traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD) and \$2 million for additional [blind rehabilitation](#) specialists and increases the number of facilities where the specialists will be located. It also authorizes VA to designate six Parkinson's Disease Research, Education, and Clinical Centers of Excellence, and at least two Multiple Sclerosis Centers of Excellence.

The bill contains provisions that will provide VA with additional tools to help it contract with veteran and disabled veteran-owned small businesses.

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"We want to make sure that veterans who do business with VA get high priority," Craig said.

The new veterans' law authorizes the replacement of the VA facilities in New Orleans, which were wiped out during Hurricane Katrina, and move forward with new hospital projects in Denver, Las Vegas, and Orlando.

The bill also includes a provision sought by Sen. Craig which requires the removal of the remains of a double murderer – Russell Wayne Wagner – from Arlington National Cemetery. Wagner brutally murdered Daniel Davis, 84, and Wilda Davis, 80, in Maryland in 1994. Their son, [Vernon Davis](#), is a veteran and he had sought help from Sen. Craig and Maryland Senator Barbara Mikulski to have his parents' killer removed from that hallowed ground.

The new law will also enable the spouse or child of a servicemember who is hospitalized or receiving outpatient medical care to begin receiving financial help through VA for their education. Sen. Craig crafted that portion of the legislation earlier this year after meeting with [Army Sgt. Jeff Mittman](#) who was blinded during an attack in Iraq.

The new law will also enable tribal organizations to obtain grants from VA to help them establish, expand, or improve veterans' cemeteries on trust lands.

"We accomplished a lot for veterans with this bill. It's a great way to finish the year," Craig said.

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Commemorative Ceremony

*An event to commemorate National Purple Heart Day
and
the End of the Korean War*



Co-sponsors:

*Military Order of the Purple Heart,
Chapter 106*

&

*Association of the United States Army,
Central California Chapter 6105*



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August 7, 2007

10:00 AM

Fresno County Court House Park, Tulare St. at L St., Fresno

<>

Chapter 106, MOPH, will have a short ceremony recognizing National Purple Heart Day, August 7, with comments from various guests.

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Chapter 6105, AUSA, will follow with a program recognizing the end of the Korean War, July 27, 1953, with comments from various guests.

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The Sounds of Freedom Military Band will provide entertainment before, during and after the events. They will be joined by vocalist Carl Granata.

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A cake cutting ceremony will follow the programs with cake, coffee and punch.

<>

***NOTE:** we will try to have chairs available but it would be a good idea to bring your own lawn chair jut in case.*

COCA-COLA Bottling Company of Southern California and Enterprise Rent-A-Car have joined the growing list of sponsors and supporters of events to Thank & Honor California's Iraq & Afghanistan Purple Heart Recipients, the 225th Anniversary of the Purple Heart and America's 524,000 living Purple Heart recipients around the world!

Welcome Home Purple Heart Events Information

America's Heroes Foundation, a project of Yellow Ribbon America are hosting two very important events this summer to honor and thank California's Iraq and Afghanistan Purple Heart Recipients and their families for their service and tremendous sacrifices they have made for our country; and to commemorate the 225th Anniversary of the Purple Heart and honor America's 524,000 living Purple Heart recipients.

The Purple Heart is awarded to members of the armed forces of the U. S. who are wounded by an instrument of war in the hands of the enemy and posthumously to the next of kin in the name of those who are killed in action or die of wounds received in action. It is specifically a combat decoration.

Over 28,000 of America's Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines have been wounded in the line of duty during the current War on Terror and have had their names added to the honored list of those who have shed their blood for our country. Because of California's size and population, we have more military members and families than any other state in the nation. Because of this we also have the highest number of wounded who are returning from this war to find their lives are forever changed. The transition alone back to civilian life is daunting. A generation ago American Patriots returned from Vietnam not to a hero's welcome, but to taunts and jeers. Californians from across the state are now joining together to say "Thank You" and Welcome Home" to America's Purple Heart Recipients for what they have sacrificed so that we all can be safe and free. It is our hope and goal to not only provide a warm welcome home to our returning physically and mentally injured Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans but to also inspire our fellow citizens to take action and give much needed community support to them and their families.

The first event will take place at The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley on Saturday, August 4th, 2007 at 10:00 a.m. Anticipating 1500 to be in attendance including representatives of every branch of California's military, state and local leaders, as well as over 200 Iraq & Afghanistan and past Purple Heart Recipients and their families. The Second Event will take place in Sacramento on September 11, 2007; we will have more information to come regarding this event.

The organization now known as the "Military Order of the Purple Heart," was formed in 1932 for the protection and mutual interest of all who have received the decoration. Composed exclusively of Purple Heart recipients, it is the only veteran's service organization comprised strictly of "combat" veterans. More information about the Purple Heart Medal and the Military Order of the Purple Heart can be found at www.purpleheart.org.

Yellow Ribbon America was founded in February 2003 as a non-partisan, grassroots effort to organize and unite all Americans in giving direct help and support to our nation's military and their families. YRA's concept is simple, locals helping locals: local businesses, residents, churches and community groups focusing their resources on helping military members and their families in their individual communities. Yellow Ribbon America has made great strides on behalf of America's military members and their families, gaining sponsorship from numerous State Legislatures, National Veteran and Community Organizations and from both the Republican and Democratic parties. This joint effort with local politics has given YRA a unique edge in helping to establish a non-partisan effort for all Americans that has organized hundreds of communities in assisting their local military members and their families. More information about the Yellow Ribbon

Yellow Ribbon America is a proud National Community Outreach Partner for the Defense Department's "America Supports You" & Military Severely Injured Center's "Heroes to Hometowns" programs. America Supports You spotlights efforts by American citizens and industries to support the nation's men and women in uniform. Heroes to Hometowns is designed to welcome home Service Members who, because of injuries sustained, can no longer serve in the military. In creating a positive transition home, Heroes to Hometowns inspires community growth and establishes a support network for Service Members and their families that allow them to ease into their hometown or new surroundings. The Yellow Ribbon America Community Outreach Campaign for America's Military & their Families is a sponsored project of the America's Heroes Foundation. The America's Heroes Foundation is a tax-exempt, not-for-profit; Veterans Organization as defined under Sections 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code Tax ID# 59-3830542.

Partial List of Events Sponsors & Supporters

California's Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger * First Lady of California Maria Shiver

The California Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Thomas Johnson

The California State Legislature

The California Democrat Party *

The California Republican Party

THE GUARDIAN

SERVING MADERA COUNTY VETERANS



News You Can Use

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

VA Regional Office, Oakland

1-800-827-1000

VA Life Insurance Center

1-800-669-8477

VA Medical Center Toll Free (Fresno)

1-888-826-2838

Cal-Vet Home Loan Information, (Fresno)

559-440-5132

Patient Advocate (Fresno VA)**

Ext. 6970

Telephone Advice Nurse (Fresno VA)**

Ext. 6933

Outpatient Clinic – Merced/Atwater (Castle)

209-381-0105

Service Representative: (DAV, Fresno VA)**

Ext. 5642

Service Representative: (VFW, Fresno VA)**

Ext. 5647

Service Representative: (AMVETS, Fresno VA)**

Ext. 5816

Service Representative: (American Legion,
Fresno VA)**

Ext. 5648

**Fresno VA Pharmacy, (to order 14 days before
you run out call by touch tone phone)**

559-225-6100 Ext. 5333

CVSO Madera County (pager) D. Blessing

559-661-6895

Fresno Vet Center (Fresno)

559-487-5660

Transportation to VA Medical appointments

** Call VA Fresno toll free number first

1-888-826-2838 ext. 6424